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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that visual aids should be used in teaching and testing language. It has been scientifically demonstrated that visuals allow for greater cognitive mapping and navigating in an environment. Visuals are a good and useful tool for examination purposes, because they lead the learner to draw out language from their own knowledge and personal experiences through exposure to the stimuli presented. They also permit strategies to organize knowledge into semantic or associative clusters. Moreover, imagery is combined with texts to make subjects more likely to think about the process of language more fully. Visual images encourage the learner to predict, infer, and deduce information from a variety of sources. Images help to bring the outside world into the classroom, and thus help to make the situation more real and in turn help the learner to use appropriate associated language. Humans have several distinct intelligences, and any significant achievement involves a blending of intelligences. Blending is useful, because different intelligences are valued to varying degrees by different cultures. In a teaching and testing environment, a visual makes the task or situation appear more authentic and prompts the learner to find direct or indirect ways to play with the language and its structures. (Contains 15 references.) (KFT)

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Using Pictures in EFL and ESL Classrooms

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"I paint what I think, not what I see"

-Pablo Picasso

"I paint objects as I think them, not as I see them"

- J. Golding

1.0 *Introduction*

It has been said over the ages that a picture is worth a thousand words. It has been long documented the different capabilities in the two hemispheres of the brain. The right side being more creative and visually imaginative and the left side being more verbally orientated. It is also well known that with practice and training the two sides of the brain can work together and improve learning by integrating the verbal with the pictorial.

In the early 1980s, David Sless termed the concept of the thinking eye. He suggested that the eye was not biologically separated from the brain. He argued that it was actually part of the same organ; or more accurately the brain is a part of the eye. Cognitive Mapping can occur with language learners. It is believed that visuals allow for greater cognitive mapping and navigating in an environment. The use of visuals can

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either lead to sensory acuteness or to sensory depravation. In the process, perception becomes the ability to process the stimuli meaningfully to the viewer.

1.1 *Why Use Visuals to Teach ESL and EFL Learners?*

Visuals are a good and useful tool for examination purposes because they lead the learner into drawing out language from their own knowledge and personal experiences through exposure to, immersion to the stimuli presented before them. Visuals permit strategies to organize knowledge into semantic or associative clusters.

It has long been documented that humans have several distinct intelligences and that each intelligence is relatively independent of the others. Research has shown that any significant achievement involves a blending of the intelligences; however, research indicates that these intelligences are valued by cultures around the world, though not always to the same degree. Three of the main selections of intelligence suggest a relationship between language learning and the arts. It can be hypothesized that linguistic, musical and spatial intelligence has the potential to work together to help enhance the learning of other languages through the use of picture prompts and visual cueing. This is because linguistic intelligence suggests that learners show a level of sensitivity to language and the relations among words. Musical intelligence reflects the learners' ability to relate to the arts. Human beings also demonstrate spatial intelligence in which they are able to observe; form mental images; as well as to make relationships to metaphors and gestalts.

The Fleming System of classification suggests that humans systematically recognize pictures. The order of the classification can aid classroom practitioners who

develop materials or write tests using visual prompts. According to the system the learner must show knowledge of the picture. This can be done through recall, recognizing similarities or differences to other pictures or the ability to relate it to other types of information. The second level of classification suggests the viewer will analyze the visual image and then attempt to separate or identify parts and/or compare the components of the illustration. This act may include assessing, judging, describing and identifying the pictures. Next, the learner will synthesize material. In order to do this, the learner will combine components, formulate new relationships, and generalize information. It is suggested that the learner will then apply the visual to the situation before applying the visual component being shown to the situation or task at hand, such as the prompt on a foreign or second language exam.

2.0 ***Defining Visuals***

In language learning there are two types of visual aids that can be used for learning. The first type is commonly known as a top down visual. A top down visual is used to test ideas against facts or solve specific problems by viewing concept maps or by relating ideas to other facts and ideas. The second type is bottom up visuals, which use graphics to help the learner sort, scan, and organize information.

A visual can be projected or non-projected. If the visual is referred to as project, it means that the visual was planned in comparison to a non-projected that occurs instantaneously or at random at an unannounced point in time. Canning-Wilson (2000) states that what we see or visually interpret can come in the form of illustrations, visuals, pictures, perceptions, mental images, figures, impressions, likeness, replicas,

reproductions, or anything that helps one " see" an immediate meanings. Visual input can also come in the form of signs or symbols. Moreover, these visuals can come in concrete and recognizable forms or as abstract images that may or may not indicate relationships.

Research has shown that people prefer illustrations that are colored, contain a story, related to previous experiences and that can be associated with places, objects, persons, events or animals for which they are familiar. In addition, research has also demonstrated that if a visual stimulus is suddenly terminated that it remains available in the conscious system only for about a second in detail. Furthermore, it has been suggested that when a visual is flashed with time for comprehension and/or is masked with another visual that recognition can be impaired. Moreover, it is important for the practitioner to think of how they are using the visual images, as visual imagery is known to interfere with performance in various concurrent visual tasks.

3.0 Why ***Use Visuals in the Classroom?***

Why should ESL and EFL teachers use visuals in the classroom? Firstly, research has shown that imagery facilitates learning. Moreover, imagery combined with texts make subjects more likely to think about the process of the language more fully. Overall pictures help us as individuals make sense of output and input surrounding us in our daily lives.

Visual images allow us to predict, infer, and deduce information from a variety of sources. Moreover, pictures can bring the outside world into the classroom; thus, making situations more real and in turn helping the learner to use appropriate associated

language. Furthermore, the uses of a visual can be used to create a social setting or to immerse a learner into a new or familiar world that cannot otherwise be created in the classroom environment.

3.1 ***Visuals place in the classroom***

In a teaching and testing environment, a visual can enhance the clarity of any given meaning by creating joint links as a stimulus or catalyst for input. Research has indicated that students are often more receptive to structure comprehension tests if the items are presented in a situational context. A picture can easily provide a situational context. Research has shown that pictures are highly successful on word recognition tests. Multiple pictures can be used to help distinguish items in listening discrimination tests.

Pictures on tests can be developed to test whether students understand the syntax and structure of the target language. In other words, a picture can most likely get a response. This means that the learner should get some form of expected response by serving as a way of generating an opinion, manipulating a situation, or expanding upon an interpretation related to the image. For example, composite pictures can be used to test a series of items because the pictures may offer the chance for a learner to communicate with his or her audience that an unaccompanied visual may not. It must also be recognized that picture items can be developed to test whether the students understand the syntax or structure of the target language.

4.0 How ***should visuals be used or not used in the classroom or a testing environment?***

If a picture is used by a practitioner in the classroom or by a tester in a form of assessment than the illustration or visual prompt should:

- be able to be interpreted
- be to the point
- show reasonable judgement
- enhance learning, sensory acuteness, and the testing situation as a whole
- not indicate violent acts, appear overcrowded, stereotype in any form or offer too many distracters.
- be able to force full or partial student production
- attempt to evaluate proficiency in writing or focus in on another skill area
- help to clarify the gist of a message
- help offer familiarity with certain cultures
- help elicit parts of speech used with or without a context.
- aid in the role of recall
- be authentic
- be sequenced
- be used to test a knowledge of meanings of different words in isolation, as well as vocabulary in a sentence context
- help to test concepts
- be adapted, edited and changed in order to meet the needs of test writers

A visual may be ineffective in a learning environment when:

- the visual is too small
- stereotyped visuals are used to represent people
- poor reproduction are created
- the picture is too far away from the text illustration
- the visual uses irrelevant captioning
- the image offers too much information related or unrelated to the picture
- the purpose of the picture is unclear and does not compliment the text.
- the picture is poorly scaled. For example, when the object is not related in size to actual object
- the picture isn't esthetically meaningful such as being too cluttered or poor in composition

Therefore before using a visual with a text or a lesson, a practitioner or tester must ask himself or herself the following set of questions:

- Why are you using this particular visual? How will it enhance the lesson or test the item?
- What are different methods for using the pictures on exams or as part of a language lesson?
- How can this picture be best tested or taught?
- How could this picture be used in a testing or teaching situation in a future lesson as reinforcement?

- How could the picture be interpreted? How will you assess the meaning of the language used with the picture if used in a different form, but remains grammatically correct?
- What is the relationship between the item being taught or tested and the visual prompt?

5.0 ***Conclusion***

To conclude, pictures allow for options, responses, alternatives, patterns and ranges by learners. According to research foreign and second language learners can see immediate meaning in terms of vocabulary recognition provided the item exists in the 1st language. Moreover, pictures can be developed into a test to see whether the learner understands the structure and the syntax.

Pictures, which are meaningful, can supplement curriculums to help the learner associate words with the objects they see in daily life. The visuals make the task or situation appear more authentic. Visuals can help practitioners and testers to identify or manipulate structures, vocabulary, functions, situations, and skills to determine what the learner has learned and/or acquired. Furthermore, visuals used as testing prompts can be used to measure semantic and associative clusters.

The advantages of visual prompts suggest that the learner is able to focus on a whole or a part of the item giving the students a better chance at finding direct or indirect ways to play with the language and its structures. Images can give or not give a context depending on what needs to be tested. Visuals offer test takers, practitioners, and language learners options for more interpretive responses, patterns, and ranges to answer posited exam questions. It can also be argued that visual testing prompts can aid in

measuring syntactic, phonological, lexical and cultural proficiency. For example, a visual cue may also be accompanied by a written cue to focus students' attention on the specific lexical unit being furnished or scoring can be modified to allow for a certain range of correct responses.

Therefore, it is important that EFL, ESL and F/SL practitioners and testers realize that how one uses a picture is as important as the visual chosen. Furthermore, it is important that the visual supplements the text instead of detracting from the text. It is the belief of this paper that visuals can aid in the learning and eventually the acquiring of a second language if used properly and that visuals can serve to enhance the learning processes.

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